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ABSTRACT

Seventy-two graduates of the School of Librarianship of Western Michigan University who attended the school during the years 1965-1970 responded to a survey questionnaire. Data were compiled on the background and personal characteristics of the graduates, as well as their estimation of the relevance of courses taken to their professional duties and responsibilities. Of the required courses taken by at least half of the respondents, Reference Service and Classification and Cataloging received the most positive responses. Courses which were regarded negatively were, in order of rank, Foundations of Librarianship, Library Administration and Management, and Selection of Books and Materials. (Author/BM)

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The Relevance of the Core Curriculum in Preparation of Library School Students for Professional Library Duties

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The Relevance of the Core Curriculum in Preparation of Library School Students for Professional Library Duties

Summary

Two-hundred and sixteen graduates of the School of Librarianship of Western Michigan University who attended the School during the years 1965 to 1970 were surveyed. Data were compiled on the characteristics of the graduates while students in the School and their estimation of the relevance of the content of the courses taken by them to their professional duties and responsibilities.

Of the required courses taken by at least half of the respondents, Classification and Cataloging, and Reference Service, received the most positive responses. Courses which were regarded negatively were, in order of rank, Foundations of Librarianship, Library Administration and Management, and Selection of Books and Materials.

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In 1973 the investigators set out to see if they could shed some light upon the question of the relevance of the courses(required courses in particular) of the School of Librarianship of Western Michigan University. By relevance was meant the bearing that the content of the courses had upon the professional duties and responsibilities of the respondents. The investigators suspected that most of what was learned in several of the required courses was not used upon the job by the graduates of the School. They were not even certain that what was learned in any of the required courses was used by a broad enough band of graduates to justify requiring any of the courses. It was not lost upon them that the entire enterprise might prove futile. Several conditions could produce this: (1) The student body for the period covered were primarily school librarians, public librarians in children's work(both areas being the School's strength in the opinion of the investigators), and primarily from the Western Michigan area. The biases of the groups could prevent generalizing the findings, though what was learned might still prove valid for Western's library school and for other regional schools established to prepare public and school librarians. (2) The response rate could be so low that invalidity would be inevitable. In this our fears were justified: the response rate was a miserable 33%. The conditions giving rise to such a low rate were several: (1) Mail questionnaires

directed to individuals reach them less often than do mail questionnaires directed to institutions reach their destinations. (2) The questionnaire was long, difficult(requiring written responses), and badly printed. (3) Loyalty to the School was minimal. (3) Measuring the relevance of the content of the courses may well be an insuperably difficult.

If what was learned was of value only to Western's library school, the faculty might reject the results(which they did before they read them), whether or not the results could be generalized.

Despite the formidable roadblocks, with trust in the School's graduates to respond, with the expectation that the Schools faculty would consider the results with open minds, the investigators carried out the study. They were fools. If only as a warning of what can happen to two who embark upon such a project, the following report is submitted. Yet they hope the report to be useful since so little is reported upon this subject.

METHODOLOGY

The names of 924 graduates and former students who began work on the M. L. S. degree in the School of Librarianship between September, 1965, and September, 1970, were arranged alphabetically, and every third one was selected as the survey sample. The latest available address of each was determined and self-addressed, stamped envelopes were mailed on August 15,

1973. By December 1, 1973, seventy-two of the 216 graduates (33%) for whom there were correct addresses had responded. (Two of the 216 were working in the School of Librarianship at the time of the survey. They did not respond; so much for loyalty and dedication.)

The first section of the questionnaire asked that the respondent comment as necessary on the teaching and the relevance of the content to their professional duties and obligations of the thirty-five course in the curriculum of the School. (The students, of course, commented only upon courses taken by them.) The responses were rated(translated) into a 1(low) to 5(high) scale by each investigator using the following scale: 5 Excellent, 4 Very Good, 3 Average, 2 Below Average, 1 Poor. Inter-rater reliability was .93. Consequently, there were numbers for statistical analysis and the comments for qualitative analysis. A program for statistical analysis was devised by Janet Edelman, a student in the School who had been employed as a computer programmer previously.

THE SCHOOL OF LIBRARIANSHIP GRADUATE

The second and third sections of the questionnaire were designed to: (1) Provide a profile of the model or typical School of Librarianship graduate and student; (2) Provide information about the current activities of graduates with emphasis upon their professional activities; (3) Provide

information about the background of persons who attend the School; and (4) Allow the respondent the opportunity to express concerns about the weakness or strengths of the program of study at the School.

Five graduates(7%), including one with a joint appointment, stated that they were college or university teachers. Four of the five were teachers of librarianship. With the exception of these respondents, all others were employed in libraries--sixty-two of sixty eight(91%). There were thirty school librarians(48%), eighteen academic librarians(29%), and fourteen public librarians(22%). Three graduates who were not employed in any capacity at the time of the survey, had been employed as public librarians. None of the graduates were employed as special librarians, though two had worked in special libraries.

Few graduates reported that they were employed in libraries with sizeable holdings, which is partly explained by the fact that half of the respondents were school librarians. Seventeen of thirty-two academic and public librarians(53%) currently employed were situated in medium-sized libraries with holdings of between 100,000 to 499,999 volumes. Eleven were employed by libraries with holdings of between 100,000 to 249,999.

The respondents gave evidence of a substantial interest in and support of professional organizations. Fifty-two graduates(72%) stated that they were members of at least one professional organization. Twenty-seven graduates(38%) held membership in the American Library Association and sixteen(22%)

belonged to the National Education Association. One wealthy graduate reported membership in nine professional groups. Many of the graduates, usually school librarians, were members of at least four professional organizations. There were fifty-four respondents who stated that at some time they had attended a library related conference, workshop, or convention.

When asked about the influences which they considered to have been most important in advancing their personal careers, twenty-two percent of the graduates indicated that the academic record made by them had been the most significant factor. Seventeen percent gave credit to placement services of the University or the School.

THE GRADUATE AS A STUDENT IN THE SCHOOL OF LIBRARIANSHIP

When asked why they chose the School of Librarianship, most respondents answered by giving their reasons for choosing librarianship as a profession. By far the most significant reason for the selection of the School is the location of the School--near the home or current habitation of the student. Associated with location is the availability of extension courses. The most significant of the reasons related to the School only was the reputation of the school library and school media center programs. The desire to get out of the classroom ranked second only to the location of the School.

Twenty-six graduates(36%) reported some personal or academic difficulties as library school students. Ten had

been commuting or working, and difficulties were brought on by their strenuous routines. Eight graduates were highly critical of teaching or course content, the most serious being the charge of favoritism and unfairness in grading(made by three respondents).

The graduates were asked to indicate those personal or academic factors which aided them in their studies. The largest number of graduates credited their academic achievements to their individual determination. Cooperation of the faculty ranked second. Most graduates indicated that there were several factors, even when stating that one was "most" important.

Thirty-four of sixty-nine graduates(49%) responding indicated that they were from small towns or rural communities of less than 25,000 population. At least one parent had some education beyond high school. Forty of sixty-eight graduates(59%) indicated that the heads of household when they entered college were in the professional or technical occupation ranks. While students, thirty(42%) supported themselves with their savings, 60% by full or part time work, and 42% by their husbands, wives, or parents, or a combination of the above. It appears that the well-to-do do not become librarians.

SUMMARY OF CHARACTERISTICS AS STUDENTS

The graduates of the School of Librarianship of Western Michigan University can be separated into four categories. School librarians constituted forty-two percent of the respondents to the survey; their opinions of the School were favorable. Adverse comments which were given came invariably from respondents

employed in academic or public libraries. Further distinctions can be made between the working or commuting students as opposed to the resident or full time.

In the opinion of the respondents the school library and media programs easily represnted the strengths of the School. Difficulties experienced as students and the reasons for selecting the School for advanced study were usually not related to the School itself. The availability of extension courses proved to have been a significant factor in recruitment and should be explored further.

By and large, the graduates were products of small-town environments and have found employment in the smaller communities or medium-sized towns in public and academic or school libraries. Half are employed as school librarians; the remainder is equally divided between public and academic libraries. Though some graduates made critical statements about their experiences as students, the largest number felt that the program was a good one.

TABLE I
TYPES OF POSITIONS IN WHICH EMPLOYED

SCHOOL		ACADEMIC		PUBLIC	
Sr. High	13	Univ.	13	City	10
Jr. High	4	Coll.	5	Cty.	2
Elem.	7			Regl.	2
K-12	6				
Total	30		18		14

TABLE II

LIBRARY COLLECTION SIZE

Fewer than 25,000	29	250,000 to 499,999	6
25,000 to 49,999	2	500,000 to 1,000,000	4
50,000 to 99,999	4	Over 1,000,000	2
100,000 to 249,999	11	Not applicable	6

Total 64

TABLE III

REASONS FOR SELECTING THE SCHOOL OF LIBRARIANSHIP

		1st	2nd	Total
1.	Wanted to get out of classroom	6	1	7
2.	Location of University	5	10	15
3.	Interest in the profession	4	0	4
4.	Availability of extension courses	4	1	5
5.	Reputation of school library/media program	4	0	4
6.	Certification	3	0	3
7.	Received fellowship	2	3	5

TABLE IV

EXPERIENCES WHICH MADE DEGREE COMPLETION EASIER

RANKED 1ST		RANKED 2ND	
Individual effort	20	Individual effort	7
Cooperation of faculty	15	Good teaching	5
Good teaching	77	Cooperation of faculty	4

TABLE IV(CONT.)

Persistence and Patience	4	Friendliness of faculty and students	4
Moral support from fellow students	3	Inspiration and help of the Director	3
Cooperation of faculty and students	3	Cooperation of students	2
Inspiration and help of the Director	2		

TABLE V

PERSONAL OR ACADEMIC DIFFICULTIES EXPERIENCED AS A STUDENT IN THE SCHOOL OF LIBRARIANSHIP

Commuting	6
Faculty favoritism and unfairness in grading	3
Demand for typing accuracy at expense of content	3
Limited number of required readings available in the library	2
Amount of work that must be done in the confines of the library	2
Lack in clarity in assignments	2
Classes boring, Limited number of library hours, Unfriendly students, Requirement of one term to spent on campus, Refusal to accept twelve hours earned at non-ALA accredited institution, Incomplete evening course offerings, Full-time position and family, Got bored easily	1
Total	26

RELEVANCE OF COURSES TO PROFESSIONAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Based upon the comments regarding the teaching and the value of a course to a respondent, the investigators rated each course on a scale of one(low) to five(high). Courses with five or fewer responses have not been included in the tables.

TABLE VI

CONTENT RELEVANCE

COURSE NO.	TITLE	NO. OF RESPONSES	RATING
630	Advanced Cat. & Class	8	4.6
627	Admin. of the IMC	9	4.4
631	Tech. Serv. for School Media C.	6	4.3
546	Storytelling	14	4.2
613	Subject Bib.: Sciences	27	4
614	Government Publications	21	4
617	Reading Guidance of Children	17	4
607	Library Experience	53	4
542	Reading Interests of Young Adults	27	3.9
*530	Intro. to Cat. and Class.	46	3.8
*512	Reference Service	52	3.7
644	Adult Reading Interests	7	3.7
628	Special Library Service	10	3.7
616	Curriculum Enrichment Materials	18	3.7
618	Libraries and Multi-sensory Communication Media	11	3.5
516	Elementary School Library Materials	13	3.5
*623	Library Research	43	3.5
612	Subject Bib.: Humanities	48	3.5
	Mean 3.4		
625	School Library Administration	15	3.3
602	Hist. of Books and Printing	17	3.3
623	College and Univ. Lib. Service	6	3.2
*510	Selection of Books and Rel. Mat.	44	3.1
*622	Library Org. and Admin.	42	3.1
	(On the scale 3 meant average)		
635	Information Storage and Retrieval	8	2.3
600	Foundations of Librarianship	60	2.2

* Required courses

TABLE VII

CONTENT RELEVANCE RATING FOR TEN MAJOR COURSES

COURSE NO.	TITLE	TYPE OF LIBRARY	RATING
*510	Building Lib. Coll.	School	3.3
		Academic	3.3
		Public	3
*512	Reference Service	S	3.8
		A	3.5
		P	3.7
*530	Cataloging	S	4
		A	3.8
		P	3.2
*600	Foundations	S	2.3
		A	2.5
		P	1.9
*622	Administration	S	3.4
		A	3
		P	2.7
*629	Research	S	4.1
		A	3.1
		P	3.3
542	Reading Interests of YA	S	3.9
		A	3
		P	4.7
612	Subject Bib.: Humanities and Soc. Sci.	S	3.6
		A	3.3
		P	3.7
613	Subject Bib.: Sciences	S	4.3
		A	3.6
		P	4.2
614	Government Pub.	S	3.8
		A	4.4
		P	3.3

* Required Course

There is a moderately positive relationship between the ratings for teaching and the content relevance of a course. The investigators do not suggest what affects what or to what degree. Academic librarians rated every bibliography course save Government Publications lower in content relevance than did the other types of librarians. Public librarians rated the teaching of all but Reference Service, Reading Interest of Young Adults, and Science Bibliography, lower than did the other types of librarians.

Every bibliography course was rated at or above the mean for content relevance. No technical course rated below the mean. Every reading interest course and every course dealing with the young rated above the mean(mean value for all courses.) The four highest rated courses were all technical.

In response to "what in our program has proven valuable to you", the respondents made fifty-eight references to specific courses. Only the required courses and library experience are tabulated here.

TABLE VIII

DEGREE OF VALUE OF REQUIRED COURSES

Course Title	References
Reference Service	15
Cataloging	12
Library Experience	10
Administration	6
Building Library Collections	5
Research	2
Foundations	1

One-fourth of all references were directed toward the dedication, enthusiasm, accessibility, and general humanity of the faculty. Unfortunately, their praise was actually directed primarily toward only a few faculty members, especially in the school librarianship programs. (Perhaps not unfortunately; perhaps inevitably. School librarians, whether librarians or students, are gushy; that is, the world is beautiful to them, beggar the degree of misery that actually obtains. Whatever evaluation they make is suspect. Which is not to say that they are not nice people: they are simply uncritical.)

In response to "what in our program has proven less than valuable to you", the respondents made comments falling generally into one of two categories: specific courses and faculty(including teadhing methods). The table that follows indicates the number of references to the required courses:

TABLE IX

COURSES OF LITTLE VALUE

Course Title	References
Foundations	10
Reference Service	6
Research	5
Administration	3
Cataloging	2
Building Library Collections	1

Almost every course in the curriculum was mentioned one or two times.

Poor teaching received as many references as specific courses and more references than good teaching in the category above that dealt with the valuable aspects. Poor teaching in general, poor teaching methods, busy work, emphasis upon grades and theory, were the major targets for complaint. It appears that teaching at the School during this period was too often not as good as it should have been, especially during the summer. A few excellent teachers sweetened but did not expunge the poison of a few poor ones.

"Have you found that the School of Librarianship did not prepare you for some situation, but should have?" elicited remarks from most respondents. Most frequently mentioned--twelve times--was a lack of preparation for dealing with audio-visual materials. An inability to deal with practical matters--book-mending and the like--received six mentions. A lack of administrative and business skills was mentioned eight times; the question came up a great deal elsewhere in the responses. The "too much theory and not enough practice" theme pervaded responses in the first half of the questionnaire and received six references in this category.